

A

# REVIEW

OF THE

# STATE

OF THE

# BRITISH NATION.

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Thursday, March 29. 1711.

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**H**E That will speak at all, must speak quickly; and he that has but a little while to speak, ought to speak to the purpose; this I observe, not from the Proposal in a Printed Paper only, but from a Letter I have sent me, Insulting me with what the *Examiner* gives a hint of, *viz.* Laying a Tax upon publick Prints and Pamphlets.

I am no Projector of Ways and Means, if I were, I should say something to what Paper and Print may or may not be able to raise, and perhaps might venture to tell you, that a handsome Fund might be rais'd by that Means, without being any Discon-

agement to Lettets, or Prejudice to Trade; but when these People speak of a Tax upon publick Papers, any one may know their Meaning, and that the Project they would have go on, is not raising a Fund, but suppressing the Thing; and I must say a Word to them upon that Supposition.

1. It will be for ever a Brand upon any Cause that attempts to suppress Printing, and will leave it upon Record, to the Infamy of the Party that espouses it, that it could not bear the Energy and Force of Truth-bearing Witnesses against it.
2. It

2. It will be a fair acknowledging, that they cannot Answer the Arguments by Reason and fair Disputing; that Demonstration is against them, that Words cannot defend them, and they dare not bring their Logicks to the Test with their Enemies.

3. It is a tacit owning, that having blinded the Poor Hoodwink'd People by Clamour and Noise, they are afraid these poor People should have their Eyes open again by Reason, Argument, and Matter of Fact.

4. It is fairly acknowledging, that their Practices, whether in Politicks or Morals, will not bear the Light; and that 'tis their Interest to prevent the Secret Histories of their Persons or Party being made Publick.

The Method of Suppressing fair Reasoning by Power, seems to have three Things in it, that I doubt not, if ever it comes to be debated in Parliament, will weigh down all the Reasons that can be given for such a Thing:

1. It has something of Arbitrary Cruelty in it, and a little resembles a late Barbarous Practice of the same Party in *Scotland*, who when they had the Power in their Hands, and Exercis'd it with Fury and Blood, caus'd the Drums to beat, when the poor Victims they were Sacrificing, came to die — That the Testimony of their Innocence, and the dying Honour they gave to God; his Church, and Cause in the World, might not be heard or known, by the abused Spectators — An Act something beyond the Cruelty of Death itself.

2. It has something in it, which seems inconsistent with what, we thank God this Nation has always been chary of, viz. The Liberty of the Subject — Which I must acknowledge, I think, is evidently Infring'd in it.

And here I cannot but make two Observations of my own upon it, which if I am mistaken, any Man is welcome to con-

sute me, and let the Impartial on both Sides be the Judges, for I am speaking of no Side in this Matter.

1. A Design to suppress Printing on either Side, can be nothing but a Design to suppress Truth; since if Falsity, Scandal, Slander, or any Thing that merits Reprehension is Publish'd, the Laws are already strong against them; and if in any Thing they are defective, the Parliament is sitting to add such new Provisions as may seem necessary; but to lay a Universal Load upon every Thing, or in *English*, to silence Mankind, is a Plot against Truth, against the Friends of Vertue, Learning, and Religion, as might be made appear on many Occasions.

2. To make such a Thing general, without distinction of the Subject, prevents all the Attempts against Vice, Prophaneness, and Immorality; all the Helps to Instruction, Education, and Religion, and all the useful Essays in Learning, Improvement, Morality, Commerce, Religion, or other useful Things, which in small Manuals have oftentimes had good Effect upon the World, and may still — And therefore no doubt, when ever such a Thing comes to be Debated, there will some Exceptions be admitted, in Cases not concerning Government, Parties, or Politicks, or else *Britain* will do a Thing no Nation in the World dare do before, except where both God and Man have been defied and insulted.

3. The Attempt will not answer the Design; for tho' it may suppress Useful Things, as above, and Robb the World of the Advantages from the Labours of honest Men — Yet Party Rage will break through, Lampoons, Pasquinades, and Inveterate Satyrs will swarm more than before, and be diligently handed about by Parties all over the Kingdom, whose Darts will be keener, and Poison stronger than any Thing Printed; and perhaps the more so,



so, as they shall be receiv'd with more Gait by the People on either Side — And I appeal to any Man that remembers the Days of King *Charles II.* when the License Tyranny Reign'd over the Press, whether that Age did not abound in Lampoons and Satyrs, that Wounded; and at last went far in Ruining the Parties they were pointed at, more than has ever been practis'd since the Liberty of the Press — And he that does not know it, must be very Ignorant of those Times, and has heard very little of *Andrew Marvel*, *Sir John Denham*, *Rochester*, *Buckhurst*, and several others, whose Wit made the Contumacious to the People, beyond what had been possible if the Press had been open.

I may add one Thing with Respect to publick News, which will be the Consequence of suppressing publick Prints, which was formerly found most Pernicious, and will be much more so now; and that is, the filling the World with Written News Letters, in which Men take always an unbounded Liberty, as they neither direct them to, or subscribe them by any Name — This leaves them free to write what they please; leaves them obnoxious to no Law — even a House of Commons cannot deal with them, for they can make no Man the Author, and no Man the Publisher — And if this does not first or last amount to a greater Evil than the publick Prints, whose Authors are known, and who are answerable for what they write, and may by a few Clauses, be made more liable; then I have no foresight of Things, and I leave this Testimony of it to be prov'd by the Consequence.

These Things I offer to the Thoughts of those People only, who flatter themselves with the Happiness of Silencing their Opposers by the Advantage of the Law, let them be of what Side they will.

Laws may be made to restrain Circumstances, to silence such or such Subject; they

may prohibit Printing any Thing relating to Government and Parties, to Politicks and National Affairs; and I'll shew my Satisfaction in it, by being the first to lay down, as I have often offer'd, and to shew that I am not speaking self or private Interest.

But to lay a Prohibition in general, without Exception, is to suggest they have something to do they dare not let the People hear of; it is to Padlock the Mouths of the free People of *Britain*; it is to deprive Men of their fair and just Defence or Vindication; and which I think may merit a Consideration by itself, it is to invade the Properties, the Livelihoods, and the Employments of Families and Trades innumerable, whose Dependance and whose Estates lie in several parts of the Printing Trade, not at all concern'd with the State or the Government, and who in common Justice, must be made Exceptions in such a general Design.

Among these are to be reckon'd Patents and Properties in Copies of smaller Books, such as *Almanacks*, *Catechises*, *Psalms*, little *Manuals* of many sorts, Religious and Moral; the Copy-Right to which are Estates to many Families, and to preserve which Right from Piracy and Invasion, a very Just and Necessary Law was made last *Parliament*, the Advantage of which is happily found in many Cases since.

Besides these are to be consider'd the Proceedings in Law in our United Neighbours in *Scotland*, the Briefs and States of every Cause in which Proceedings are done in Print, and must be so, and a Tax cannot be laid on them, but it would infringe the Articles of the Union — Innumerable other Cases will clash with the Design of these Gentlemen in a general Loading the lesser Publication of Things in Print — And when they come to push their Project in their own Way, they will find it.

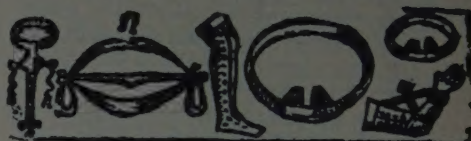
Mean Time, that some Restraint should be put to Scandal, Ribaldry and Reproach, to insulting Governments, vilifying Ministers of State, Invading Men's Reputation, and the like, by obliging every Man to set  
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his Name to what he writes, making the Proceedings in Personal Injury Summary and Decisive; giving double Costs of Suit, and such other Amends to the Person Injur'd as may be thought fit; preventing abusive Descriptions; Printing Initial Letters of Names, and oblique pointing at Persons in Matters Scandalous, &c. Some Law against these, would have every wise Man's Assent; every honest Man would

be desirous of having such a Law made, the sooner the better: *All the rest* favours of Guilt, Party-Interest, Encroachment upon Liberty, Arbitrary Imposition upon the People, besides Invasion of Property, Ruine of Families, and Unhinging Men in their Lawful Employments—With this Addition, that they will leave the Mischief propos'd to be Remedied in a worse Condition than they find it.

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Printed for and sold by John Baker at the Black-Boy in  
Pater-Noster-Row. 1711.